

**Town of *Dunstable* Selectboard**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**October 12, 2021**  
**Town Hall, Dunstable, MA 01827**

**Convened:** 6:00 pm

**Present:** Leah D. Basbanes, chair, Kieran D. Meehan, vice chair, Ronald J. Mikol, member(s); Brian M. Palaia, Town Administrator; James W. Dow, Chief of Police; Harold Simmons, Advisory Board; Jon Swift, 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration Committee; Joan Simmons, Planning Board; Amy Degen, Groton Interfaith Council; Jack Wagner; Lt. Shaun Wagner, Tyngsborough Police Dept.

**Call to Order & Public Forum**

Ms. Basbanes called the meeting to order. She then briefly went over the agenda which includes Appointments, Review & Approval of a Special Legislation Request, Discussion with the Groton Interfaith Council, a Donation Account Request from the Anniversary Celebration Committee, Discussion of Fire Dept. Next Steps, and an Executive Session.

**Review & Approval of Changes to the Town's Special Legislative Request for Liquor Licensing**

Mr. Palaia reported that this item can be dispensed with as the Board has already addressed this request in July. The Board noted this is a bit like ground hog day. We've definitely been here before. Mr. Palaia was confident we don't need to do anything again. Further, Rep. Harrington's office has confirmed as of today that it appears that a third vote on this isn't necessary. Honestly, there just aren't any apparent changes. So here we are. The Board asked if this is normal. Mr. Palaia responded it isn't normal. The Board only needs to approve substantive changes and small changes like wordsmithing don't need to go back continuously for approval. The Board asked how many dry towns are left. Mr. Palaia wasn't certain, but felt it fewer than 4, especially with Dunstable seeking liquor licensing. The Board asked Mr. Voelker briefly about an inquiry from the State House New Service, Mr. Voelker briefly elaborated on their questions which were all about the town's dry status.

**Groton Interfaith Council to Discuss Co-Sponsorship by Dunstable of Event Along with Groton & GDRSD**

Ms. Degen introduced herself. She's a longtime resident of Groton whose children have all attended GDRSD. Her organization fosters respect, justice, and community among religious organizations. They have had planned events for to foster tolerance and understanding. But the pandemic forced some of them to be shelved. Thankfully they have been able to start up again and plan to show a movie at the Middle School regarding a well-known holocaust survivor. The event has been co-sponsored by the Groton Police Dept. and the Groton Select Board. She noted this sponsorship doesn't include a financial commitment, it's just support. Chief Dow noted he has also been asked for co-sponsorship and the Dunstable Police Dept. is willing to joint Groton's department in sponsorship. Ms. Degen thanked him and noted we have sadly experienced some hate speech expression in the region including swastika graffiti. She then outlined what GDRSD has done in the past to teach about the holocaust and what she has done as an educator. The Board asked in terms of co-sponsorship if this includes pushing out a message. Ms. Degen responded she would take whatever is possible. Mr. Palaia suggested putting an announcement on the town's website under its news section. The Board agreed and suggested it could also be included in the Board's *What's Happening in Dunstable?* publication that it puts out quarterly. The Board asked how many incidents have happened. Ms. Degen responded about 3 in the past week. Mr. Swift confirmed that as a parent in the district. Ms. Degen expressed sadness that it's happened and stressed that it underlines the importance of these sorts of educational events. She then reported that a School Committee meeting is forthcoming where more will be put together including a flyer. The Board directed Ms. Degen to work with Mr. Voelker on this and agreed to be a co-sponsor.

A motion was made by Mr. Meehan to co-sponsor the event. The motion was seconded by Mr. Mikol and passed unanimously.

**350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration Committee's Request for a Donation Account**

Mr. Voelker reported that the Anniversary Committee has requested a donation account be setup so that they can begin accepting donations for the purpose of funding events. All that is needed per the Treasurer/Collector and Town Accountant is a vote by the Board authorizing the establishment of the account and set the Committee as responsible for

*Approved and adopted on 10/26/21*

it. This would be similar to what the Summer Concert Series does. They have such a donation account which they use to pay for various expenses regarding the Summer Concerts. Donations are deposited with the Treasurer/Collector and then all expenditures go through the ordinary vander warrant process with bills submitted to the Town Accountant. Mr. Swift elaborated on where the committee is. They are still in the planning process and they are very excited. In order to do the events they've envisioned they need this. Mr. Swift asked a few other questions that were answered by Mr. Voelker regarding the Treasurer/Collectors hours and the warrant process.

A motion was made by Mr. Meehan to establish a donation account for the 350<sup>th</sup> Celebration to be under the control for expenditure and the responsibility of the aforementioned committee on the subject with expenditure via the ordinary warrant process. The motion was seconded by Mr. Mikol and passed unanimously.

### **Discussion of Fire Department Next Steps**

Mr. Palaia reported on the resignation of the Fire Chief who has decided to leave before the end of his contract. Since we've been talking to neighboring communities about regionalization, it was floated that we approach Groton for an Interim Fire Chief. When they did a tour of the department it was proposed we apply for a grant and seek funding to research and study this. But to do that we need someone from Dunstable to represent Dunstable. And if Groton is already providing a leader for the department that person may not be objective for those purposes. Mr. Palaia noted that one of the plans for a consultant was to look beyond the region to avoid influence or bias. The Board noted that there are other states where regionalization is common and a consultant from one of those jurisdictions would likely make some sense. Still the Board was concerned with the department's turnover and personnel difficulties. Chief Murray did a great job and the Board wasn't happy to see him leave so soon. Mr. Palaia then turned to the process of finding an Interim Fire Chief and the work he's done so far. The Board asked about the process and the financial costs. Mr. Palaia responded by outlining how the process works and how we would pay someone. There are multiple options including potentially hiring a retired Chief. The only issue with a retired Chief is the limited hours they can work. Still, when we first hired Chief Murray he was only for 20 hours a week. That was gradually expanded. We may want to just seek a short term Interim to get us through the process of investigating regionalization and forego our plans to hire a full replacement. The Board asked about things that need to be done that could be left behind in transition. Mr. Palaia responded that Chief Murray will stay until November 12<sup>th</sup> and he will provide a list of items.<sup>1</sup>

### **Appointments & Resignations**

The Board began by noting there are four resignations to dispense with. The first three concern Catherine Reynolds, Tiffany Naughton, and Tracey O'Neil who are all resigning from the 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration Committee. The Committees chair has requested that Deborah Courtney be appointed to replace Ms. Reynolds, and they will have a recommendations for one of the other vacancies by the time of the Board's next meeting. Mr. Palaia asked if this is the result of time commitment issues. Mr. Swift responded that it was and the Committee believes Ms. Courtney will be an eager addition. The fourth concerns the Fire Chief. Shawn Murray who has served in that capacity for 3 years intends to resign effective November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021. The Board expressed sorrow at Chief Murray's departure thanking him for all of the work he has done. Chief Dow then introduced Mr. Wagner. He's from the local area, has attended the academy graduating back in December. Mr. Wagner briefly addressed the Board expressing pleasure in being able to join the department. The Board was comfortable with the appointment and thanked Mr. Wagner for his service.

A motion was made by Mr. Meehan to accept the resignations. The motion was seconded by Mr. Mikol and passed unanimously.

Deborah Courtney appointed as a member of the 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration Comm. Term Expires Dec. 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023  
*Motion by Mr. Mikol, second by Mr. Meehan, passed unanimously*

Jack Wagner appointed as a Patrol Officer Term Expires June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022  
*Motion by Mr. Mikol, second by Mr. Meehan, passed unanimously*

### **Town Administrators Report**

Mr. Palaia began his report by discussing Free Cash. He reported that he and the Town Accountant anticipate between \$400,000 and \$500,000 to be certified. Since there is no Special Town Meeting anticipated, the certification request is

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<sup>1</sup> See Appointments & Resignations heading for acceptance of the resignation.

deprioritized with DOR. He then reminded the Board that the Advisory Board recommended subsidizing GDRSD's budget with more additional free cash for this year, so structurally the town's budget is dependent on \$450,000 of Free Cash going into the FY23 budget, so there won't be much to work with for capital requests for FY23. Mr. Palaia then turned to the Annual Audit. The town's audit has begun and the Auditors are onsite this week collecting data. He then reported on the new Town Engineer. Mr. Langlais's first task will be to get a technical specification organized to bid the Tennis Court replacement. There are also associated Stormwater requirements and a way to double count the work toward one of MS4 permit requirements, so we will wrap this into the project if we can. He then provided the latest on the Rt. 113 Infrastructure Project. We are still waiting for the EEA to sign off on the legislation. We provided responses to their review comments a month ago and have left multiple phone messages and sent emails without response. Sen. Kennedy has been asked to expedite a response from them and this is in process. Mr. Palaia then reported on where things stand in relation to ARPA. He's found a few more opportunities to fund municipal needs in the Federal Interim Rule so his intention is to price them out. These include potential Stormwater/MS4 projects and municipal record digitization. The deadline to submit a budget for the use of these funds to the federal government has been extended until March of 2022. On a related matter the town's first FEMA reimbursement for COVID expenses has finally been received (\$57,000) and the town is working on finalizing the second application for FEMA funds currently. He then updated the Board on the Water Dept. and the Water Operator. He's been having conversations with both Groton and Pepperell's Water Dept.'s about taking over for SWSS in February when their contract expires. Groton is interested but has expressed concerns about getting such an arrangement approved. Pepperell on the other hand has given us a verbal proposal to take over as operator for the same value we pay SWSS but including additional work that we have to pay extra for from SWSS. In addition, Pepperell's service would be supported by two licensed professional engineers, GIS capabilities, pre-staging resources in Dunstable to respond to emergencies, and other higher level administrative support we do not get from SWSS. In his opinion the Pepperell proposal would be an improvement. The Water Commission will discuss this at their meeting in early November, and from there an inter-municipal agreement can be developed.

Also in the air with Pepperell has been the mention of using their ARPA funds to build an interconnection between Pepperell and Dunstable so that we can sell them water. He felt this to be very promising. The Board was pleased with this news noting that this has been discussed for decades. Still the water operator matter would alone be a significant improvement. Mr. Palaia then reported on talks regarding Fire Dept. regionalization. He's spoken with the Groton Chief and Town Manager who came up last week for a tour of the department. It was agreed the next steps if we want to proceed is for Dunstable to apply for a Community Compact Grant from the Commonwealth to fund a consultant to look at how this can work. Mr. Palaia then turned to an update on Ambulance Services. He's spoken with officials in Pepperell. The Pepperell Fire Chief in particular has expressed a willingness to give Dunstable a proposal to cover the town's ambulance needs in place of Trinity. We are waiting for some data that Trinity has said they will provide to help them vet what this service would cost us. Mr. Palaia then reported on work being done with Mr. Voelker regarding IT Services. He elaborated that he's charged Mr. Voelker with researching a possible change of vendors for this service, including working with department heads to ensure proper coverage. Consequently, it may end up costing the town a bit more than we currently pay as there may be some costs associated with a change. The change seems in order as the relationship has become somewhat strained and Mr. Palaia expressed the opinion that the current vendor might be considering dropping the town anyway. Mr. Palaia then provided an update on health insurance and the JPA. The JPA had a meeting last week for prospective new members. It looks like Winchendon is going to evaluate joining. Townsend also seems to be back on board and participating now that they have secured an Interim Town Administrator. The plan is to issue a RFP this winter for competitive pricing. MIIA, our insurer, already seems nervous. Mr. Palaia then finished by reporting that Mr. David Tully from Highway Dept. helped to see the house at 91 River Street demolished. We had funding for that and it came in far less than expected. The Board was pleased by the news and noted the left over funds might be able to be used for other related cleanup. The Board then added that the Affordable Housing Committee will be meeting soon. The consultant that they hired this time is very knowledgeable and the new RFP appears to be good work. The consultant has a lot of great ideas and the Board feels confident that this committee and its important work will be able to proceed. Mr. Palaia asked if the Board would be formally reviewing it or not. The Board noted that the Committee is still working on it. The goal appears to be to have the stamp of approval by the Board and the Advisory Board. Ms. Simmons asked about the last consultant. Mr. Palaia responded that this consultant appears to have ghosted the town and the report wasn't very good regardless. We made a progress payment, but did not pay for the whole bill.

## **Minutes**

The Board reviewed the minutes for September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Upon review the Board determined to approve the minutes.

A motion was made by Mr. Mikol to approve the minutes of September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021, as written. The motion was seconded by Mr. Meehan and passed unanimously.

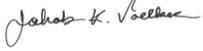
*Approved and adopted on 10/26/21*

## **Executive Session**

The Board determined to forego the Executive Session.

A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Meehan at 6:35 pm. The motion was seconded by Mr. Mikol and passed without objection.

Respectfully submitted by



Jakob K. Voelker, Assistant Town Administrator